

# Range extensions and notes on the status of little-known species from Venezuela

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No comprehensive review of the Venezuelan avifauna has been published since Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps (1978). Since then much ornithological research has been conducted and Venezuela has become a popular destination amongst North American and West European birdwatchers. Here, interesting range extensions, new state records and other significant observations are presented for 34 species. A total of 10 major range extensions are reported: Crested Eagle *Morphus guianensis* (Península de Paria, Sucre), Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* (Llanos, Apure), Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus* (Llanos, Apure), Military Macaw *Ara militaris* (San Fernando de Apure, Barinas/Guárico), Spot-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus maculicaudus* (Río Caura, Bolívar), Chapman's Swift *C. chapmani* (Río Caura, Bolívar), Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift (*Panyptila cayennensis* (Interior Cordillera, Miranda), Black-chested Tyrant *Taeniotriccus andrei* (Monagas), Ringed Antpipit *Corythopsis torquata* (Monagas) and Canada Warbler *Wilsonia canadensis* (Península de Paria, Sucre). New state records (where these represent important geographical extensions) and lesser range extensions are presented for 19 other species. In addition, attention is drawn to the Mucubají Pass, at the head of the Santo Domingo Valley, Mérida as an important flyway for migrant hirundines.

Initials in parentheses refer to the authors and their field companions, detailed in the Acknowledgements.

## SLATE-COLOURED HAWK *Leucopternis schistacea*

One seen well at close quarters, both perched and in flight, on the edge of gallery forest in savanna at the Río Tiquire, north-west Bolívar on 17 March 1995 (NB, CGB, JH, GMK) represents a considerable eastward range extension from western Amazonas on the Orinoco (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978). The solid slate-grey plumage, including the entire underparts, short deep-based bill with red cere, red legs and single white median tail bar were clearly noted.

## CRESTED EAGLE *Morphus guianensis*

In Venezuela, known only from the north-west Zulia and Aragua (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978). The authors' attention has been drawn to a pair of wings of this species, collected at the village of Los Mangos (400 m) on the Península de Paria, Sucre by Francisco Bisbal of the Museum of the Rancho Grande Biological Station at Maracay, where they are now held. This represents a substantial easterly range extension within Venezuela and the first record for Sucre (Sharpe 1997).

**BLACK-AND-WHITE HAWK-EAGLE** *Spizastur melanoleucus*

Singles at km 17 south of El Dorado, Bolívar on 23 January 1993 (DB, JC, RtE, GMK), Caño Colorado, Monagas on 12 March 1995 (NB, CGB, JH, GMK) and at the Palmichal Zone for Protection of Public Works (1,030 m), Carabobo on 27 August 1995 (DA, CJS). Known in Venezuela from Mérida, Aragua, Miranda, Distrito Federal, south-east Bolívar and Amazonas (Lentino *et al.* 1984); the above records confirm its occurrence in Carabobo, eastern Monagas and farther north in Bolívar than previously recorded. It is regularly recorded at Colonia Tovar, Aragua and in the Macarao National Park, Distrito Federal.

**ORNATE HAWK-EAGLE** *Spizaetus ornatus*

Three birds on Loma Los Naranjitos, El Avila (1,575 m) during January and February 1996 represent the first record for Distrito Federal (Fernández Yopez 1953, Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978). At least one was also regularly seen or heard in the same location throughout 1997, particularly during the early part of the year (CJS).

**BLACK HAWK-EAGLE** *Spizaetus tyrannus*

There are no previously published records for the Central Coastal Cordillera, which includes Carabobo, Aragua, Miranda and the Distrito Federal (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978), although it is listed on two recent checklists (Lentino & Goodwin 1991, Lentino *et al.* 1993). Nevertheless, it can be regularly observed at several locations throughout this mountain range as follows: Palmichal Zone for Protection of Public Works (1,030 m), Carabobo State; Rancho Grande Biological Station, Choroní Road and Colonia Tovar, Aragua; Guatopo National Park, Miranda; and Macarao and El Avila National Parks, Distrito Federal (CJS). It can even be seen displaying over parts of Caracas (CJS), although it was not recorded here earlier this century (Fernández Yopez 1953). An interesting record is one displaying and mobbing two Ornate Hawk Eagles above Caracas at Loma Los Naranjitos, El Avila (1,575 m) on 31 May 1997 (CJS).

**YELLOW-BREASTED CRAKE** *Poliolimnas flaviventer*

There are no previous published records for Apure (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978), although it is listed as "rare" at Hato El Cedral private reserve (Ascanio & Rodríguez 1995). Eight at Hato El Cedral on 3 April 1996 (CJS, RCT), during extremely low water conditions, add to state records. It has probably been overlooked elsewhere in the llanos.

**SUNGREBE** *Heliornis fulica*

One on the Río Caura, from the bridge at Maripa, north-west Bolívar on 14 March 1995 (NB, CGB, JH, GMK). Previously recorded south of the Orinoco only in south-east Bolívar and Amazonas (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978), although there are unpublished records from the same area of the Río Caura in recent years (e.g. Jan Vermeulen *et al.* unpublished trip report).

**UPLAND SANDPIPER** *Bartramia longicauda*

One flew north, just east of Maripa, Bolívar on 14 March 1995 (NB, CGB, JH, GMK); the first published state record, although Boesman (1998) has also recorded the species in this area. Known only as a passage migrant in Venezuela, with published spring dates from the north-east of the country being 25 March–2 April (Friedmann & Smith 1955), and was considered common on passage in savanna areas in the same area in March, September and October, between 1944 and 1948 (Friedmann & Smith 1950). Previous published records are north of the Orinoco from Monagas west to Barinas and Mérida, and south of the Orinoco in Amazonas (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978). Zimmer & Hilty (1997) present four records from Junglaven, Amazonas in March and April in the early 1990s.

**RUDDY TURNSTONE** *Arenaria interpres*

Previously known only from coastal areas (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978), the first inland records were one at Hato El Frio, Apure on 16 March 1995 (CJS) and two at the same location on 24 November 1995 (EM, CJS).

**STILT SANDPIPER** *Calidris himantopus*

Previously recorded only on the coast (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978), this species is actually numerous inland (S. L. Hilty *in litt.* 1997). Three records in Apure are all c. 300 km inland; one at Hato El Frio on 27 January 1995 (CJS, KW), two at Hato El Frio on 16 March 1995 (CJS), one at Hato El Cedral on 1 January 1996 (CJS, RCT), 15 at Hato El Cedral on 3–4 March 1998 (CJS) and 38 at Hato El Cedral on 17 March 1998 (RCT, CJS). These records suggest that the species is regular in small numbers on inland waters.

**MILITARY MACAW** *Ara militaris*

Three, at close range, flew west at dusk in dry scrub north of San Fernando de Apure, Barinas/Guárico on 15 January 1993 (DJA, DB, JC, GMK) may have related to escapees. The identification was straightforward: large almost wholly green macaws with red foreheads and wing-bends, and the lower back, rump and most of tail, except reddish central feathers, being blue. This is apparently the southernmost record in Venezuela of this threatened species (Collar *et al.* 1994, Rodríguez & Rojas-Suárez 1995), with other recent records from Dpto. Girardot, Cojedes (Desenne & Strahl 1994). Although it is listed only for north-west Zulia, and Distrito Federal by Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps (1978), currently known locations for Military Macaw are: the north slopes of Avila National Park, Distrito Federal, e.g. two above Camurí Grande on 3 January 1996 (CJS); Guatapo National Park, Miranda, where groups of 30–50 are easily seen along the higher part of the road (CJS); Cerro La Misión, Falcón, where it may nest in cavities in the limestone cliffs (CJS) and Sierra de Perijá. There are also recent records from the north slopes of Henri Pittier National Park (Fernández-Badillo *et al.* 1994).

**SAFFRON-HEADED PARROT** *Pionopsitta pyrrhia*

Six at San Isidro Tunnel on 28 October 1995 at 1,500 m (CJS) is the first published record in Barinas. The species appears to be frequently seen at 900–1,500 m in the Santo Domingo Valley (David Ascanio pers. comm., S. L. Hilty *in litt.* 1997). The species is now thought to be threatened (Rodríguez & Rojas-Suárez 1995).

**PAVONINE CUCKOO** *Dromococcyx pavoninus*

One heard and seen well between Los Alpes and La Macanilla in Guatopo National Park, Miranda on 7 March 1992 (CJS) is the first state record; it has previously only been recorded in the Central Cordillera at Colonia Tovar, Aragua. A further Aragua record is of a bird tape-recorded by CJS at Rancho Grande Biological Station on 4 and 6 December 1997 (GR, CJS, DAS). Another new state record is a bird tape-recorded by CJS at La Capilla Verde (1,800 m), c. 15 km south-east of La Azulita on 22 January 1998 (CJS, DAS). The species is now known to be much more widely distributed (S. L. Hilty *in litt.* 1997) than indicated in Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps (1978), e.g. Boesman (1998) reports its presence in the lower Santo Domingo valley, north-west Barinas and along the Azulita road, Mérida.

**TAWNY-BELLIED SCREECH-OWL** *Otus watsonii*

At least one heard at Campamento Río Grande, Bolívar on 4 February 1993 (DB, JC, RtE, GMK). Previously known from Zulia and southern Táchira, extreme north-west Bolívar and central and southern Amazonas (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978) including the Cerro de la Neblina (Willard *et al.* 1991). Given its occurrence in Suriname (Parker *et al.* 1996), the species' presence in eastern Bolívar is unsurprising.

**CRESTED OWL** *Lophotrix cristata*

One heard along the entrance road to Campamento Río Grande, Bolívar on 4 February 1993 and three heard and one spotlighted in the same place on 6 February 1993 (DB, JC, RtE, GMK); at least one heard along the lower Río Caura near Maripa, Bolívar on 14 March 1995 and one heard along the entrance road to Campamento Río Grande, Bolívar on 17 March 1995 (NB, CGB, JH, GMK). Boesman (1998) also confirms its presence in the Caura forest. Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps (1978) speculated that the species might occur in southern Venezuela given its occurrence throughout the Guianas (Parker *et al.* 1996) and in parts of central Amazonian Brazil (Sick 1993), and Lentino *et al.* (1984) discovered two males (both taken from the Río Caura, Bolívar at 30 m) in the collection of the Estación Biológica de Rancho Grande (EBRG); one from Puerto Cabello and the other from Caño La Urbana; the only previous published record was a specimen taken at 100 m in northern Táchira.

**BLACK-AND-WHITE OWL** *Ciccaba nigrolineata*

Three calling (two seen) at the Palmichal Zone for Protection of Public Works (1,030 m), Carabobo on 12 January 1996 (MLG, HL,

CJS). This is a westerly range extension of a species described as rare and local by Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps (1978). It can also regularly be heard during the early year at Rancho Grande, Aragua (1,000 m) (CJS).

**BLACK-BANDED OWL** *Ciccaba huhula*

At Campamento Río Grande, Bolívar: one heard on 4 February 1993 (DB, JC, RtE, GMK), the same bird spotlighted the following night, and one heard on 17 March 1995 (NB, CGB, JH, GMK). One heard at the lower Río Caura, just west of Maripa, Bolívar on 14 March 1995 (NB, CGB, JH, GMK), from where Boesman (1998) has also confirmed its occurrence. Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps (1978) list occurrences at El Cambur on the Lower Río Caura, Bolívar and at Cerro Guanarí and Caño Casiquiare, southern Amazonas.

**ANDEAN POTOO** *Nyctibius maculosus*

One at *c.* 2,300 m at Páramo de Tamá, Táchira on 13 January 1993 (DJA, DB, JC, GMK). Previously known in Venezuela only from the Boca de Monte in extreme east Táchira (Fjeldså & Krabbe 1990, Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978).

**LEAST NIGHTHAWK** *Chordeiles pusillus*

At the lower Río Caura, south of Maripa, north-west Bolívar: two on 15 March 1995 and one on 16 March 1995 (NB, CGB, JH, GMK). Previously known south of the Orinoco, in Venezuela, only in eastern Bolívar from the Altiplanicie de Nuria south, and in north-western Amazonas. These new observations are located within a gap in the species' known range. In addition, it is worth noting that the species is common in the Gran Sabana, where it has been seen hawking over savanna in groups of up to 20 at San Ignacio de Yuraní, San Francisco de Yuraní, Liwo-Riwo and Kavanayen (955–1,050 m) (CJS).

**SPOT-TAILED NIGHTJAR** *Caprimulgus maculicaudus*

At the lower Río Caura, south of Maripa, north-west Bolívar: three on 14 March 1995, and at least one heard on both 15 March and 16 March 1995 (NB, CGB, JH, GMK). On the first date birds were spotlighted at close range, photographed and the song was tape-recorded. Previously recorded in Venezuela in south-west Barinas, Miranda and southern Amazonas along the Río Negro (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978).

**CHAPMAN'S SWIFT** *Chaetura chapmani*

One bird at the lower Río Caura, south of Maripa, north-west Bolívar on 15 March 1995 (NB, CGB, JH, GMK) appeared to be of this species: almost uniformly dark upperparts, with the exception of the paler rump and uppertail coverts, and very dark underparts exhibiting almost no contrast between the throat and breast. In Venezuela published records are from north-west Zulia, Aragua, Sucre and northern Amazonas (Chantler & Driessens 1995, Meyer de

Schauensee & Phelps 1978), although there are also unpublished records from eastern Bolívar (Gunnar Engblom pers. comm.).

**LESSER SWALLOW-TAILED SWIFT** *Panyptila cayennensis*

Two at Turgua, Miranda on 4 February 1996 and two at El Paramito (1,550 m) near Cuicas, Trujillo on 26 October 1997 (CJS) are first records for their respective states (Chantler & Driessens 1995, Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978). The species is more widespread than previously realised (e.g. Boesman (1998) reports its presence in north-west Bolívar at the Caura forest) and it has been regularly observed along the Turiamo Road (50 m) near Ocumare, Aragua (CJS).

**GREENISH TYRANNULET** *Phyllomyias virescens urichi*

This taxon, endemic to north-east Venezuela in Sucre, northern Monagas and northern Anzoátegui (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978), was afforded species status by Cardoso da Silva (1996). It is poorly known and threatened by deforestation (Parker *et al.* 1996). Two at Península de Paria, Sucre on 9 February 1995 (DB, JC, RtE, GMK) were below the lower elevational limit of this taxon (900 m), as given by Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps (1978). They were feeding, on the forest-edge, at mid-height in a relatively small (c. 10–15 m) tree, gleaning food from the underside of leaves and constantly moving from branch-to-branch. Identified as *Phyllomyias* on the basis of their short, relatively stubby bills, indistinct superciliaries terminating immediately behind the eye, dark wings with indistinct whitish tips to coverts and tertial fringes, and mid-length, uncocked tails; the only other member of this genus in range, Sooty-headed Tyrannulet *P. griseiceps*, is distinctly smaller, less olive-green on the upperparts and almost lacks any trace of wingbars.

**BLACK-CHESTED TYRANT** *Taeniotriccus andrei*

One watched closely for about half a minute at Caño Colorado, Monagas on 13 March 1995 (NB, CGB, GMK) was the first state record and a northerly range extension of this little-known and presumably rare species. The contact call, which was apparently previously undescribed (David J. Agro pers. comm.), is most closely reminiscent of a *Hemitriccus* tyrant or *Pipra* manakin, being moderately loud, short and high-pitched. Unfortunately it was not possible to make a tape-recording. The bird was perched at c. 4–5 m in bamboo within *varzea* forest, below the canopy in an area where bamboo was admixed with a small, former banana plantation. Previous Venezuelan records come from Misión Araguaimujo, Delta Amacuro and north-west Bolívar, along the lower Río Caura and the central portion along the Río Carun (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978), and probably in Amazonas (Ridgely & Tudor 1994). Elsewhere the species is known from Brazil and Suriname (Parker *et al.* 1996).

**RINGED ANTIPIBIT** *Corythopsis torquata*

One watched bathing in a small pool inside wet, transitional forest at Caño Colorado, Monagas on 12 March 1995 (NB, CGB, JH, GMK)

was distinguished from either Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapillus* or a waterthrush sp. by its striking and large white throat patch, grey-brown head lacking a supercilium, obvious orbital ring and crown stripe, and more concentrated and heavier underpart streaking, almost wholly restricted to the upper breast, and from *Hylopezus antpittas* by its structure and shape. Not previously recorded north of the Orinoco (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978, Ridgely & Tudor 1994) and apparently not noted by Boesman (1995), who listed significant state and regional records from this locality.

#### **PURPLE MARTIN** *Progne subis*

In recent years, significant north-easterly passage has been observed at Laguna de Mucubají, at the head of the Santo Domingo Valley, Mérida (3,470 m) in August, with migration continuing into November. Significant sample records include 150 birds per hour on 15 August 1997, over 400 birds per hour on 16 August 1997 and 100 birds per hour on 10 October 1997 (CJS). During August they are the most numerous hirundine, being accompanied by smaller numbers of Barn *Hirundo rustica* and Cliff Swallows *H. pyrrhonota*.

#### **SAND MARTIN** *Riparia riparia*

Considered a transient in Venezuela (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978, Paynter 1995). However, it has been observed on post-breeding passage crossing the Andes in a north-easterly direction at Laguna de Macubají, Mérida (3,470 m) during September–October. Small groups, amounting to *c.* 100 per hour, were counted with other hirundines on 14 September 1994, whilst several hundred were with other hirundines on 25 October 1995 and 27 October 1995 (CJS). During April, it migrates north in small numbers across the Gran Sabana (900–1,400 m), Bolívar with the more numerous Barn Swallow, where it has been recorded as late as 18 April at Peraitepuy del Roraima (1,365 m) (CJS).

#### **CLIFF SWALLOW** *Hirundo pyrrhonota*

A passage migrant, recorded from Mérida, Caracas and La Orchila (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978). Recorded in very large numbers passing north-east through the Andes at Laguna de Mucubají, Mérida State (3,470 m) during August–October. For example, over 100 per minute on 25 and 27 October 1995 with Barn Swallows and Sand Martins, and several hundred per day on 15–16 August 1997 with Purple Martins and Barn Swallows (CJS). A paper on the importance of the Mucubají pass for boreal migrants and movements of tropical species is currently in preparation.

#### **BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER** *Mniotilta varia*

Paynter (1995) describes this species as “not common in Venezuela, having only been noted at six or seven locations in the mountains from the Distrito Federal west to the Andes of Mérida and Táchira and once in eastern Bolívar”. This is, in fact, a common wintering species in the north and west of the country; there are 50–60 specimens from these

areas in the Phelps Collection in Caracas (S. L. Hilty *in litt.* 1997) and the authors have records from a large number of localities north of the Orinoco. The following are the second and third published records south of the Orinoco: at least one between km 112 and km 113 on La Escalera, south of El Dorado, Bolívar on 28 January 1993 (DB, JC, RtE, GMK); and one on the lower Río Caura near Maripa, Bolívar on 14 March 1995 (NB, CGB, JH, GMK).

#### **GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER** *Vermivora chrysoptera*

This species appears to have been overlooked in recent literature: Paynter (1995) maps only six reports from Venezuela. It is, however, frequent in the Central Coastal Cordillera, where singles can usually be observed at Rancho Grande (1,000 m), Aragua from October–March (e.g. males on 4 October 1995, 20 March 1996 and 15 November 1996; CJS), and Boesman (1998) reports its presence in Carabobo. It is similarly frequent in the subtropical and temperate Andean forests, e.g. one at the Pico Humboldt Trail, Mérida on 8 January 1993 (DJA, DB, JC, GMK) and a female there on 19 January 1998, at 2,380 m (CJS, DAS). Additionally, the first record of Lawrence's Warbler *V. chrysoptera* × *V. pinus* in South America was recorded along the La Azulita road, Mérida on 19 November 1996 (Dr & Mrs H. Mudd, R. Ryan). The bird resembled Blue-winged Warbler *V. pinus* in its greenish olive mantle, white wingbars, wholly bright yellow underparts and yellow of crown reaching the eye. Golden-winged Warbler features were the extensive black throat, triangular black cheek patch and grey wings.

#### **BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER** *Dendroica virens*

One at Península de Paria, Sucre on 10 February 1993 (DB, JC, RtE, GMK). Paynter (1995) lists two other reports from Venezuela, in November 1968 (Zulia) and January 1984 (Aragua) and there are a small number of unpublished sight reports, but this is the easternmost Venezuelan record (S. L. Hilty *in litt.* 1997).

#### **CERULEAN WARBLER** *Dendroica cerulea*

Although listed as a winter resident from September–March (Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978), records were previously only available from November–February (Paynter 1995). One along the Ocumare Road, Henri Pittier National Park, Aragua on 8 March 1995 (NB, CGB, JH, GMK) provides confirmation of its presence beyond February. It can be regularly seen in small numbers from October–February at Rancho Grande, Henri Pittier National Park, three males on 3 October 1995 and one there on 24 October 1996 (CJS) confirm arrival by October.

#### **CANADA WARBLER** *Wilsonia canadensis*

A male above the village of Manacal on Cerro de Humo, Península de Paria (900 m) on 25 January 1990 (CJS). This appears to be the first record in this range and Sucre (Curson *et al.* 1994, Meyer de Schauensee & Phelps 1978, Paynter 1995, Ridgely & Tudor 1989).



**PARIA WHITESTART** *Myioborus pariae*

One on Cerro El Olvido above Macuro on the Península de Paria (685 m) on 5 August 1988 (CJS). This is the easternmost recent record for the species, confirming its continued presence at the eastern extreme of the Península, and it is also the lowest altitudinal record for this threatened species (Collar *et al.* 1994, Rodríguez & Rojas-Suárez 1995).

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## A comment on the validity of the British Great Tit *Parus major newtoni*

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The Great Tit in Britain is today recognized as a distinct subspecies *Parus major newtoni* solely on the form of its bill (Cramp & Perrins 1993). This was not always so. The type description (Appendix) given by Prazak (1894) in connection with **Typus**: K.u.k. natul. Hofmuseum in Wien. Nr. 10664, male, which was based on 19 British specimens examined at the Hofmuseum in Vienna, lists a suite of diagnostic plumage characters, none of which has withstood closer scrutiny (Hartert 1907, Witherby 1920, Saunders 1927, Witherby *et al.* 1938–41), and states that it is smaller than *P. m. major*, but makes no mention of the bill. We are told neither the sex ratio of the British series (although they were probably males) nor the origin of the *P. m. major* specimens with which they were compared. The description gives a hint that they are from central Europe, perhaps Austria. They are